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In a time where social and political tensions run high, this study seeks to shed light on the experience of Muslim women living in the United States of America, who wear headscarves. Five Muslim women who wear the headscarf were interviewed and kept journals for a week regarding their perceptions of what other people think of them, how they negotiate their behavior in public in relation to their headscarves, and whether they noted any differences in these perceptions/behaviors before and after the 2016 presidential election.

The initial and earlier days of wearing a headscarf brought the greatest inner turmoil for most of these women, especially in relation the 9/11 events. Negative experiences and stares are something they contend with, as well as being assumed to be foreign. Some noted an influx of positivity and open inquiry from strangers after the presidential election.

Each has their own way of navigating these experiences, likened to Du Bois' double-consciousness, and each woman experiences public life with some degree of caution around others due to wearing the headscarf. Greater yet is the support they seek from everyone, and particularly from fellow Muslims, to be thought of as normal, autonomous, unjudged individuals going about their day like every other person in America.

HEADSCARF IN AMERICA: PERCEPTIONS, CONSIDERATIONS, AND  
BEHAVIORS OF MUSLIM WOMEN, BEFORE AND AFTER THE 2016  
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

by

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## APPROVAL PAGE

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In a minimalist way, to wear a headscarf is to wear a piece of clothing. However, if the headscarf was a piece of clothing like any other in America, or even the West, there would not exist the prolific amount of literature regarding what is often referred to as “the veil” or “a hijab.” The words *veil* and particularly *hijab*, have been used in a multitude of ways—sometimes erroneously—in place of other forms of Islamic religious covering (i.e. niqab, burqa, chador, etc.). *Headscarf* falls under the umbrella terms of *veil* and *hijab*, while denoting a specific amount of coverage (covering of the head, versus inclusion of face and/or eye-coverage).

This study of the headscarf in America is about women and their daily lives. In a time when tensions are high, socially and politically, I want to present some of the realities of wearing a headscarf in America. The three main questions I hope to address in my study are: How do women who wear the headscarf think they are perceived by others? Does wearing a headscarf affect the way women negotiate their behavior in social spaces? Are there any differences in those perceptions/behaviors before and after the 2016 presidential election?

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The headscarf is embellished with symbolic meaning, for those who wear it and those who do not. The cloth is laden with religious, political, cultural, historical, and indeed social, significance. In the following, I will share some history of the practice of head-covering, reasons Muslim women wear a headscarf today, politics of the headscarf in Western countries (Canada and France), perceptions of Muslims/Islam in the United States, and some theories useful to my study.

#### *History of The Headscarf*

Head-covering arose from various cultures and religions, including Judaism and Christianity (Tayyab 2006; Amer 2014). However, the first textual mention of “veiling” the head/hair originates from an Assyrian text from 13 B.C. The text contained legal guidelines for which women in society could and could not cover their heads, separating “respectable” women (covered) from prostitutes (uncovered). Veiling originated as a “sign of status and was practiced by the elite in ancient Greco-Roman, pre-Islamic Iranian, and Byzantine empires.” (Alvi, Hoodfar, and McDonough 2003). In Byzantine culture, the veil was representative of “honest” women. Despite commencing in non-Arab, Middle Eastern and Mediterranean countries, the veil was already present at the time of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad in Arabia (Alvi et al 2003; Güven 2013).

The Qur'an, the sacred text of Islam, enjoined women—who presumably already wore headscarves because of the times—to cover their bosoms, as well. Although the Qur'an mentions the covering of bosoms and ornamentation explicitly, there is no mention of hair. As such, there exists some dispute about whether Muslim women are required to cover their heads. The verses in the Qur'an that surround veiling, appear vague in terms of what needs to be covered, or tied to the wives of the Prophet, thus setting an example and expectation for the rest of Muslim women (Alvi et al. 2003; Güven 2013). Whether considered Islamically mandatory or recommended, most Muslim-majority countries hold notable counts of Muslim women who continue to use headscarves.

In the face of colonialism, however, the practice of veiling saw a decline across various nations in the Muslim world. In 19<sup>th</sup> century Egypt particularly, “Europeanization” became evident. The upper classes began adopting sheer forms of headscarves seen in Turkey, and many women did not wear it at all if visiting European countries. A book came out in 1899 that decried veiling altogether, and center-pieced the liberation of women as the removal of headscarves (Güven 2013). Other literature emerged, mostly by European men, depicting the veil as a centerpiece of the poor treatment and control of Muslim women by Muslim men. Such information was disseminated during the invasion of European power across Ottoman and/or Middle-Eastern regions, rendering these countries and cultures as lesser and in need of updating.

As political unrest increased across these countries (namely the Middle East and North Africa), various movements occurred to counter the opposing powers and their

views. Unveiling became a trend amongst the elite and powerful in some countries, who viewed it as a cultural item, whereas in others, it became a symbol of unity and/or under the category of religion injunction. Sometimes veiling/unveiling was taken up by the ruled to counter agendas the ruling power pushed. Regardless of the stance, the veil was no longer in the private, or negligible, sector of society. This cloth was now a political piece and has remained as such over the years. Depending upon the country and decade, unveiling or veiling may have been a trend, but it was related to which political and/or religious groups and ideologies held power and influence (Alvi et al. 2003; Güven 2013).

#### *Reasons Women Wear a Headscarf*

To this day for many in the West, the headscarf symbolizes the oppression of Muslim women at the hand of Islam and Muslim men (Haddad 2007; Peek 2011; Al Wazni 2015). Yet, various studies have found that Muslim women in the West have chosen to wear it themselves; it is an expression of faith (Read and Bartkowski 2000), of freedom of religion (Moore 2007), of feminism and/or empowerment (Haddad 2007), a cultural expression, and even a fashion statement (Williams and Vashi 2007). Most women choose to wear it, for the reasons just mentioned, as well as for the religious aspect. I wear the headscarf because I view it as an obligatory commandment on Muslim women prescribed by God in the Qur'an that I personally choose to comply with. Supplemental to this reason though, is the "Muslim feminist" conception of the headscarf that does not automatically mark it as purely adverse. Such a Muslim feminist view of wearing a headscarf has been described as one in which "She refuses to play the gender roles of the patriarchal order...When a woman takes the Hijab, she rejects this role in the



sexualized society and asserts that sex has nothing to do with her public life” (Tayyab 2006). The environment and conditions that bring about religiosity in Muslim women who ultimately choose to cover, can vary and is nuanced (Westfall, Welborne, Tobin, and Russell 2016), especially considering the one-dimensional assumption that Muslim women could only be forced to wear a headscarf. Context is imperative in interpreting whether the headscarf is a source of oppression, expression, culture, religion, etc. (Davary 2009), and it is with this understanding of headscarf that this study carries forth.

As a Muslim woman who also wears a headscarf in public, I recognize that there are various conceptions of how to “properly” wear it. Some women are particular about the looseness/tightness of their clothing, while others are concerned about the amount of hair that can be seen or not while wearing a headscarf. The social aspect of clothing is often in what it silently communicates (Alvi et al. 2013). Dutch-Turkish women maintain their religion individually as well as publicly by donning the scarf, and how they present themselves in public speaks to the “status, ethnicity, and professionalism” that they choose to present (Ünal and Moors 2012). In a study interviewing American college girls, they found that many of the women engaged in “liberating performances” in the face of American consumer culture. Relying on Goffman’s definitions of stigma and social performance, they connect how these Muslim women, who wear the headscarf, construct their public identities in relation to the thoughts of others around them, particularly in managing the negative assumptions, thus creating the liberating performance. This may take the forms of dressing in fashionable ways but fusing it with and maintaining the use of a headscarf (Gurbuz and Gurbuz-Kucuksari 2009). Ultimately, how people justify their

level or mode of dress comes down to individual decisions and what wearing the headscarf means to oneself (Droogsma 2007). As identity and agency are presented through clothing in the West despite the fashion system's constraints on women (Guy and Banim 2000), Muslim women too, must negotiate the identity they express and the imposed identities they contend with (Droogsma 2007).

#### *Western Views of Head Covers and Muslims/Islam*

Although Muslim women who do not wear the headscarf were not interviewed for this study, there is work focused on the idea of “unveiling” in more recent times. It is an analysis of how the formation of selves (Foucault) and identity into a “liberal Muslim” is produced in relation to unveiling, which is more pertinent to understanding Muslims in the West, rather than the mainstream Orientalist view of veiling (Fadil 2011). Although not more important to understanding Muslims in the West, unveiling does result in less chances of Islamophobic attack, as one is not visibly Muslim without it. On the other hand, women who wear a headscarf are more likely than Muslim men to be the target of attack due to that visibility. Women who cover their faces in addition to their heads, are more likely to face attack/negative reaction than all of the above (Everett et al. 2015). As the experiences of women who cover beyond headscarves are different, they have not been included in this study which seeks to shed light on the experience of wearing a headscarf. I believe they deserve their own study since clearly the consequences—and I suspect, the motivations—for wearing a face cover are somewhat different than for those who wear headscarves only.

Women who wear a headscarf are “othered” and subject to politics in ways that women who do not cover are not. Chandra Mohanty points out the image Western feminism has elicited of the “Third World Woman” as one who is inferior, subservient, financially dependent, and a religious zealot (1984). Muslim women, particularly those who wear religious clothing, are no exception to such ideas as many Muslim-majority countries are a part of the Global South, where the “Third World Women” reside. Muslim women have been viewed as victims and without rights, although work has been done to discuss that such assumptions are not reflective of the many factors that impact Muslim women’s lives (Abu-Lughod 2013).

The image of oppressed, covered Muslim women who need saving, contributed as a justification for the War on Terror (Jasbir 2007). Foucault’s biopolitics and Mbembe’s necropolitics are suitable in understanding the dynamics of Muslim bodies and the War on Terror and U.S. Foreign policy (Saleh 2016), however these are pretty exceptional cases. Habeas Viscus (Weheliye 2014) better captures the politics of being a Muslim woman who covers in the U.S. as it is not culturally or biologically bound. More importantly, whereas biopolitics/necropolitics are reflective of outright violence and states of exception, Habeas Viscus directs attention to the *potential* for violence, which arguably putting on a headscarf in the West presents. The wearing of headscarves is a gendered phenomenon, prescribed by Islam. However, in the West, it has become a racialized phenomenon as well. In light of the “Third World Woman,” I doubt that most people imagine my fair-skinned convert friend who is of Scottish descent and wears a headscarf when they hear the words “Muslim woman.” Race and gender (and sexuality)

are deeply imagined in the Western (Muslim or Non-Muslim) gaze in regard to Muslims (Jasbir 2007). In addition, Muslim women who wear a headscarf have become symbolic of the conflict between personal (religion) and the public (state); they have been placed between individual rights of freedom and Western notions of safety, security, and public well-being (Davids 2014).

#### *Head Covers in France and Canada*

The incidences in France concerning headscarves in the public sphere, namely at school and some workplaces, has been on the international news scene in recent times, to a notorious level. The same tensions have been mirrored in Canada, namely in Quebec. The tensions are present in relation to the political and cultural symbolism ascribed to the headscarf in these societies (Alvi et al. 2003). For people in Europe, the uniformity of headscarves under ideology (Islam) is reminiscent of fascist movements of days past, coupled with the negatives views of female oppression at the hands of Muslim men (Alvi et al. 2003; Shirazi and Mishra 2010). Additionally, Non-Muslims in Canada/North America may view women in headscarves as “hidden” from the public, as in voting cases. Their assumptions that religious/Muslim men are the perpetrators of such dress codes for Muslim women may stem from the distrust of other social blockages (voting rights) religious men in the Christian tradition were previously responsible for (Alvi et al. 2013).

Lastly, ideas about separation of church and state are regarded differently in France than in the United States. In France, institutions and public spaces should be void of religious symbols due to secularism (Shirazi and Mishra 2010). Women who veil are

not welcome in government and public-sector jobs, and girls who wear it to school face penalty (Amer 2014). In the United States however, religion should not infringe on the state or be favorable to one religious community, nor should the state infringe upon the people's religious freedoms. France's stance allows for expectations of cultural assimilation from immigrants, whereas in the United States, the expectation is not made as strongly or at all (Shirazi and Mishra 2010).

### *Perceptions of Muslims/Islam in the United States*

Muslims contribute to their own stereotypes in terms of expectations of gender and what "proper" attire and actions are for Muslim women (Yaqin 2007), but how do stereotypes, if at all, come up in and affect the average Muslim woman's daily life? Droogsma discloses the perceptions that veiled women have of respect received from Non-Muslim and Muslim men, and she shares how these women make active decisions about their interactions with men. Additionally, the women she interviewed saw changes like increased security checks at the airport, difficulty in finding a job, and comments from strangers after the 9/11 attacks (2007). Islam in general has been associated with connotations of submission and terror for a long time due to media images and propaganda (Peek 2011).

In her book *Behind the Backlash: Muslim Americans after 9/11*, Lori Peek uncovers the sentiments and experiences of many Muslim American women and men, before and after the 9/11 attacks. While hate crimes against most religious groups in America have seen reduction, the number of hate crimes against Muslims has gone up in recent times (Ser 2016). Peek unearthed some of the perceptions and stereotyping

Muslim men and women faced soon after the 9/11 attacks. Through Peek's work, it is shown that Muslim American women (and men) are aware of stereotypes and negative attributes being associated with them. In renditions of personal experiences, some Muslims voiced how their behavior changed in relation to the negative expectations attributed to them, and definitely in relation to (negative) reactions of others towards them. Of the Muslim women who wore headscarves interviewed by Peek, many noted how they were automatically rendered as foreign/not American by many non-Muslims and that people usually assumed that they were forced to wear the headscarf. The women also voiced how others might perceive them as a potential source of violence, indicating that they were aware of themselves as a source of fear for other people. Peek's findings showed how women who wore the headscarf before and after 9/11 were aware of the Islamophobia and stereotypes ascribed to them and Muslims in general. Are these perceptions that Muslims carry the same 15+ years later?

#### *Theories Useful to This Study*

Closely tied to the idea of public identity, is that of double-consciousness. W.E.B. Du Bois describes it as viewing oneself through the eyes of another (Du Bois 1903). The idea that Muslims in the West experience a double-consciousness is present in discourse (Mir 2014), but there is lack of focus on Muslim women in respect to their headscarf. Erving Goffman discusses the negotiations people make while being in public spaces; for each engagement and encounter, the people at hand make decisions about how to conduct themselves in relation to one another (1963). Are the ways in which Muslim women who wear a headscarf engage with others different than or affected by the presence of their

headscarves? I have found myself actively considering other people's perceptions of me, Muslim and Non-Muslim alike. My perceptions have led me to crossing the street when other pedestrians are walking in my direction, and I sometimes navigate myself through shops around other customers, just to avoid the possibility of nervous/angry/unsure stares. Is this a part of the experience of donning a headscarf for other women who veil, too? Or do they disregard it and carry on as they would without a headscarf? In a historical moment, in which sociopolitical tensions run high, particularly in relation to the 2016 Presidential race and its results, I inquired into the lives of Muslim women and how they negotiate social spaces and public settings while wearing a headscarf.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

To gain in-depth perspectives, I conducted 5 voice-recorded, qualitative interviews of women ages 18 years or older. The women vary in age, race and ethnicity/heritage, but have lived in the U.S. for years or all of their lives. The interviews are semi-structured so that my research questions are addressed, and in order to allow for flexibility of direction based on responses of the participants. Every interviewee was asked “When/how did you come to wear a headscarf?” Depending upon their answers, I asked additional questions in relation to the three research questions (How do women who wear the headscarf think they are perceived by others? Does wearing a headscarf affect the way women negotiate their behavior in social spaces? Are there any differences in those perceptions/behaviors before and after the 2016 presidential election?).

The participants were recruited through a flyer posted on social media (Instagram and Snapchat). In addition to interviews, I asked each participant to keep a daily journal or diary to write in for one week, of their experiences, decisions, and feelings in relation to wearing a headscarf each day. The participants were primed to write about whatever they feel inclined to write about regarding the topic of headscarf in America, with the interview questions in mind, but the flexibility to address anything they deem important or relevant. All but one interviewee was able to provide journal entries, out of the five.



As I also wear a headscarf living in America, I have included an autoethnography of my experiences relating to this study. In this “case study of self” (Egeli 2017) I share a narrative similar to the interviewee’s, discussing key perceptions, feelings, and incidents related to wearing a headscarf in the United States over the years.

A limitation to conducting interviews and collecting journals is that, in the interest of time, I could not study a large, representative sample of all American Muslim women who wear a headscarf in public. In the case of interviewing about the headscarf and writing my autoethnography, I may carry assumptions and/or bias regarding the phenomenon. I attempt to counter this by referencing ideas or quotes from the interviews/journals/autoethnography.

The transcribed interviews, the diary entries, and the autoethnography were analyzed via open coding to see what concepts, themes, and patterns arose. I first coded words on the basis of positive, negative, and neutral experiences. Within each of these categories, I coded for what sorts of phenomena occurred in relation to the words I linked to positive/negative/neutral. Next, I looked for patterns and repetition of various experiences or themes, as well as anomaly experiences/themes. Lastly, I ascribed my theoretical frameworks to each concept, and weaved them together in the discussion section.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

In the following, I reveal the findings of each interview mixed with the interviewees' journals. Each case further revealed or confirmed something about the phenomenon of wearing a headscarf in America. I aim to divulge their stories into a portrait that is authentic and reflective of what they described in their interviews and journals. Finally, I include my autoethnography.

#### *Interviewee 1*

Interviewee 1 is a recently college-graduated young Muslim woman. Born and raised a Muslim to a North African father and White American mother, she began wearing a headscarf at the young age of 10. No one else in her middle-class, immediate family dons the headscarf, but she was inspired by a friend who began wearing it at that time. Although happy with her decision, she sometimes struggled to deal with the "ignorant" questions and comments her pre-teen peers would pose such as "Do you shower with your scarf on?" and "Why do you wear that do-rag on your head?" at her predominantly White populated school. Some questions were as direct as "Oh are you a terrorist?" Overall, though, she describes her experience of wearing a headscarf as minimally problematic and smooth. Whatever struggles she did face were mostly relegated to the first 5 years, and after the events of September 11, 2001.

The struggles she underwent in her earlier years of donning the headscarf consisted of hyper-awareness of people staring, whether in school or non-school settings, and whether they were actually staring or not. She questioned to herself as to why people were staring at her, whether they viewed her as bad because of her religion, and whether she was perceived as a terrorist. That sense of being unsure and questioning while around strangers temporarily came to an end when she stopped wearing headscarves in high school “trying to be someone” that she was not. However, it was replaced by a loss of self; she “felt naked.” She was miserable and at a low point in her high school years. She lost the constant reminder that she lived for God, which wearing a headscarf had provided for her.

After wearing a headscarf again around the end of her freshman year in college, she is comfortable and confident in it. She no longer questions the looks people give her unless a clear-cut comment is made towards her. Even then she turns the other cheek. She expressed that “...people are human, and they do have bad days and if they are rude to me like, I try not to take it as because of my religion, [or] because of what I’m wearing.” However, she did express, quite hesitantly, that she finds herself aware of her headscarf in certain settings, such as “...predominantly white, prestigious areas I feel more...vulnerable.” Despite efforts to ignore or avoid feeling that way, “it’s there sometimes.”

The types of experiences she has that make her aware of her headscarf again consist of negative and positive ones. The outright Islamophobic ones are infrequent and she tries to forget about them. She shared an incident that occurred in a popular coffee

shop in D.C. where a woman persistently made Islamophobic comments to her. She could not recall any of the specific things that the woman said as it was years ago, but all she remembered was how shocked and vulnerable she felt as the people around her simply looked on or ignored the situation. However, she does not interpret their silence as complacency or agreement with the woman; she assumed that they were just as shocked and unsure as her on what to do. She also assumed the woman was mentally disturbed for saying everything as persistently as she did. She wishes and believes that people should stand up for Muslims in those instances, though.

Another type of negative experience she has is when people question her ethnicity. She explained that “I think that’s the common perception that I get from people, *‘Oh she’s definitely foreign, and I want to know where she’s from.’*” She dismisses their inquiries by stating that she was born and raised in the U.S. and does not provide further information on her background. In one of her journal entries, she pondered over how “Some people are surprised when I speak, and I don’t have a strong accent, as if I am supposed to be foreign...”, although many are also not surprised. In the same entry, she wondered whether people would treat her differently if she was not white and blue-eyed, and/or wore ethnic outfits. She thinks about whether people assume if she is a convert, versus a born and raised Muslim. She has this same thought around other Muslims, because “Even people in our Muslim community have a certain perception of what Muslims should look like, and if they don’t fit those criteria, assumptions are made.”

She has had a spike in people asking her open and honest questions, wanting to learn more about the headscarf and/or Islam. Interestingly, she noticed this spike occurred around and after the 2016 presidential election. She noted that people smile at her more often or do gestures such as door-opening for her. For one of her journal entries, she intentionally paid attention/chose not to be oblivious to her surroundings that day and noted that children will stare at her out of curiosity very frequently. She wished that parents provided opportunities for the children to ask her questions and thought that parents should go out of their way to teach their children about other cultures and practices.

In another one of her journal entry days, she wrote about how a shop greeter spoke the Muslim greeting to her with a smile. She approached the greeter and found out that the greeter had learned greetings for many different cultures/languages just to make people feel more welcome. She also revealed that at times “I feel like people are afraid to approach me and have small talk. Since I am different, sometimes I feel like it causes a social barrier among people.” Thus, when people make an effort to smile and/or are friendly to her, she appreciates it deeply. In her last journal entry, she described how she socially experimented by going out of her way to smile at everyone she encountered and made small talk. She felt that it removed the barrier she feels at times, and that people seemed less afraid once they saw her smiling and being conversational. She made a side note saying that, “I don’t feel like I should put on an overly nice demeanor for people to give me the same respect that they give everyone else,” but that she also wonders what can be done to make more people comfortable in approaching women who wear a

headscarf without fear. Lastly, she admitted her idea that Trump supporters are more likely to perceive her as a terrorist, but that she does not dwell on such thoughts and enjoys her obliviousness to people's perceptions of her in public on most days.

#### *Interviewee 2*

Interviewee 2 is a nearly middle-aged, North African woman who has worn the headscarf in her adult life for the past 4 years. Born and raised a Muslim in her North African home overseas, she wore the headscarf from a young age, by choice, alongside her similarly aged older sister who also wanted to wear it. They went to school, swam, and played happily in their headscarves until middle school, where they realized the other girls around them opted for more Western and trendy clothing—clothing that did not involve wearing a headscarf. Not wanting to feel left out, they both abandoned wearing headscarves and joined their peers. By the age of 19, she moved to the U.S. and started a life of her own.

She became accustomed to people asking her where she was from, which she assumed was because of her features (although I personally suspect her accent may have contributed as well). She looked like a fair skinned Puerto Rican to many. She was also used to people asking about her faith, especially at work. The only things she never got used to were (non-Muslim) people's critical comments when they found out she was a Muslim, and their questioning of why she did not wear a headscarf.

As she had moved to the U.S. a few months before 9/11, she found herself having to defend Islam to non-Muslim coworkers and strangers in the aftermath. She said that non-Muslim people would express their views of Muslims to her as potential threats and

hypocrites who “...fast for 30 days, and they’ll party for the rest of the year...” to which she would respond that Islam is about peace regardless of how Muslims may act. On the other hand, she felt that fellow Muslims provided little support to her, especially since she did not wear a headscarf. She said that, “It’s like they’ll look at you differently.” She perceived negativity or lack of empathy from the Muslim community, and she felt that she got more encouragement out of the questioning of her non-Muslim coworkers to begin to wear a headscarf. But it was not an easy or immediate transition. She knew in her heart that she wanted to wear the headscarf, but always second-guessed her desire due to the potential consequences. She recognized the wearing of headscarf as a command from God and wished to fulfill it, but she questioned whether she was “...*still going to get the same equal opportunities like everybody else...*” if she went through with it. Such thoughts would cross her mind for years. After her daughter was born, such thoughts crossed her mind more frequently, as she wanted to set an example to her child. However, she continued to wonder “...*is everyone going to look at me differently?*” and understood that they would.

In 2014 she realized how diverse her workplace in a medical setting was. She noticed at work, how people of other cultures and religions were not afraid to express their faith through their dress, and even saw a couple of Muslim women who wore headscarves. By the time the month of Ramadan began, she still understood that people may view Islam as a “terror” religion but she adamantly wanted to wear the headscarf. On the first day of Ramadan she wrestled a lot with herself but left the house with a headscarf on, only to run back inside and take it off. After looking in the mirror in the

midst of doing her hair, she paused and eventually thought, *“Nobody’s going to hurt you, nobody’s going to stop you from going to work, from pursuing your career, whatever it is, because you’re doing this for Allah, and He’s going to be on your side all the time.”*

She ultimately left her home with a headscarf on, and she was hyper-sensitive and aware of the possibility of people staring at her while she drove her 8-minute commute to work. She laughingly reflected that she probably attracted attention she would not have received otherwise had she not been looking around to see if people were staring at her. She explained that “...nobody was looking at me. I was actually bringing that attention to myself. So, by me looking, and turning my head, I looked suspicious.”

Once she arrived at work, she did feel that all eyes were on her, but this time it was not her imagination. She had some people congratulate her, noted that some people looked down or away from her, and felt that some people were scared to talk to her. Some expressed concern, asking if she was okay, including her manager who questioned if this was really “her” and what she wanted to do. She figured they were also shocked because she went from showing a lot of skin to covering up much more, plus wearing the headscarf. She quieted their concerns and questions by relaying that this was who she always was on the inside but was finally able to express and act on the outside. She literally thanked some of her coworkers, explaining to them that if it were not for their questioning, she may have never begun to wear it. She explained her reasons for wearing it to her coworkers, “...hijab is just about modesty, it’s about self-respect... it’s giving the woman control, and she doesn’t just present her body. She does have a brain, and she



does have equal rights. She doesn't have to show skin to be approved and approached." She felt that they accepted and respected her choice and felt unbothered for the most part.

In public spaces in general, however, she feels to this day that she is looked at as "different" by people, whether it be non-coworkers at work, or in general settings like a restaurant. She expressed that she does not agree with language that implies "us/them" dynamics but went on to say that regardless of setting, she feels stared at. "I can be at a gas station and be stared at. I can be in a fancy restaurant, and I can be stared at. The waitress, you can tell, *'Maybe she doesn't want me there.'*" She also related that "When I didn't wear hijab they just assume I spoke English, but when I was covered they assume I don't speak English." She feels that people would talk down on and at women who wear the headscarf if they realize the women do not speak English.

The headscarf does have some effect on how she presents herself and behaves in public. She stopped wearing makeup and perfume when she first began wearing a headscarf, and she opted for more modest clothing. (She has since started wearing makeup again in 2017, though.) She experienced changes in conduct, too. She feels that she holds back on anger more and tries to project a level-headed, calm approach to people. She shared an experience that she had at a pool in South Carolina. She was on a little vacation in 2017 with her older sister, her older sister's kids, and her own daughter. The kids were in the pool, and later on her sister, who also wears a headscarf, dipped her legs/feet in as she sat at an edge of the pool. A white woman walked by and told the sister "You need to take your legs out of this pool, you're making it dirty" and "I'm so glad Trump is going to be the president, so he can get rid of you all," and walked away. Her

sister was furious and about to yell at the stranger, but she calmed her down and convinced her sister that it was not worth it. She said "...it was hard to watch that and not say anything to her, because if I did I was going to be at a certain level, but I wanted to show that we are better than her." She also wanted to show that she was unaffected by the stranger's words and that they would carry on about their day regardless. The stranger did not bother them again.

Overall, she believes that many people have thought about Muslims in a consistent matter since 9/11, even if she did not feel the effects as significantly in the 9/11 aftermath, since she did not wear a headscarf in the past. Now that she wears a headscarf, she feels it and thinks that it is in relation to 9/11 still, and that people simply feel more emboldened to say what they want now, with Donald Trump as president. She assumes that such people are misguided and uneducated about Islam and Muslims. She sees no end to the reality of ignorant people and accepts it as a sad but true part of life.

### *Interviewee 3*

Interviewee 3 is a young Muslim woman who graduated from college a few years ago and is pursuing a medical route career. She was born and raised a Muslim to two South Asian parents who moved to the U.S. decades ago. After attending classes run by a friend of the family who taught adolescents in the community about Islam, her younger sisters chose to wear headscarves at young ages, one as young as 8 years old. When she was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, her mother began wearing a headscarf, but her mom never expected or asked it of her sisters and her. By the time her sisters chose to wear it, she was in middle school and did not want to jeopardize fitting in with her peers.

Eventually by the summer before high school, she made the decision to wear the headscarf. It was not a grand epiphany; she felt like she might as well follow suit of her mom and younger sisters. After wearing it, she learned more about the religious aspects of it and grew to appreciate it even more.

Her initial perception upon wearing a headscarf in high school was not that her peers would think of her as a terrorist. Instead, she described that, “I was just scared that they would think like *Oh, she’s different*, or that I wouldn’t want to be friends with them anymore...” She was pleasantly surprised that despite going to a majority White high school, it created no such barrier between her peers or friends and herself, as she was not aware of any judgement or change in treatment towards her on their end.

In high school she dressed in more Western clothing with her headscarf, as she still cared about fitting in to some degree with her peers. But by college she did not care and wore South Asian dress with her headscarf and noticed that people stared much more than when she wore Western clothes. As she put it she got the type of stares “where it’s like they’re really thinking negatively of you. Not that *she just looks different* but like *Oh she might bomb this place...*” The negative stares followed her outside of her campus, too. She shared that sometime after President Trump was elected, she was shopping when “... this guy like, whispered ‘Man, terrorists are about to go in there to bomb it up’ and I was like shook to the core, and I didn’t respond, but I wish I had said something...” She describes that “...there’s definitely some places that make me more cautious and like, that I have to be more careful because of how people react.” Being more careful entails being aware of who is around her and her surroundings, especially if she is by herself in

public. In those instances, she tries not to engage with others as much and finish whatever business she is attending to. After news broke out, mostly across social media, of a teenage Muslim girl who also wore a headscarf, and who was out with friends for a late-night food-run, being attacked and killed in 2017 during Ramadan, she (the interviewee) did not go out without absolute reason for a month. She felt afraid herself, and her mother also encouraged her to wait until things calmed down. She added that “when something really big happens, I definitely get more nervous and try not to like, go out as much, just because the way things are happening at that time.” She feels that you can never be too safe since some people carry guns, so staying to oneself can prevent any confrontation or misunderstanding.

Her workplace is also a main site of where she might experience negativity in relation to her headscarf. Working at an optometrist’s office, she gets along great with her coworkers regardless of which office location she may be for the day. However, the patients that come through may not provide her with the same positivity. She noted that the less ideal encounters occur more frequently in the office that is located in a more “conservative” town than the other offices, but that it mostly comes down to the individuals that come through the office. She entertained the idea that it may be an off-day for the people that are stand-offish or rude, but she notices when they are normal and friendly with her coworkers but become closed off when they interact with her. Once she ascertains the vibe and mood of the patient she interacts with, she acts accordingly. She has many friendly and easy-going conversations with patients, as is her personality. If, however, they seem distant or uncomfortable around her, she becomes distant herself and

less smiley; she keeps it strictly professional with no extra conversation, does her job, and moves on to the next patient. She feels like she has to be more cautious and aware around people that give her that distant or stand-offish feeling. Another motivation to keep to herself at times depending on the patient she describes is "...I guess for my own dignity, like I don't want to be talked down like *Oh you're just a tech...*"

Regarding the aftermath of the 2016 election, she felt that she had to be more considerate of her safety whilst going out. She encountered family or friends who suggested she stop wearing her headscarf altogether for safety reasons, but she has never been inclined to do so. If anything, she seemed more annoyed with the reactions and expectations she thinks she gets from fellow Muslims because of wearing a headscarf. She feels that women who wear a headscarf are thought of as more judgmental and automatically more religious, just for wearing it. She does not understand why people place more meaning to it beyond it being that a woman who wears it is simply fulfilling one of many commandments from God in Islam. She shared a time when a Muslim friend was hesitant to introduce his girlfriend to her and her sisters; she felt he did so because he assumed she and her sisters would judge him and/or be rude to his girlfriend just because they are perceived as more religious due to their headscarves. In a journal entry, she recalled reading Twitter messages/Tweets of a Muslim woman she follows and who also wears a headscarf discussing the judgement in the Muslim community. The woman clearly also did not like receiving complaints and comments on her style of wearing a headscarf with tight or revealing clothes from other Muslims, citing that it is between her and God. She (the interviewee) conceded that it is a command of God that is either done

or not done and should not be something that has to be explained to other Muslims. The last instance she mentioned that showed the weight given to perceptions of fellow Muslims, involved her younger brother, who has Down's Syndrome. He had questioned as to why she did not put her headscarf back on when it slipped while she wore it loosely in the car during a family road trip. She described, "It was so cute, and it really made me think that hijab is such a big part of my identity. I don't know who I would be without [it], and I can never imagine taking it off."

As a perk of wearing a headscarf, she explained with a laugh that "I got a big head, and it makes my face look smaller when I put it on. I got a double chin." In a journal entry, one day was "grateful" for her headscarf because of a particularly bad hair day. She also enjoys moments of kindness that people share when they complement her headscarf or strike up questions and conversation with her, that she would not have had if not for her headscarf. In another journal entry day, she described how a White woman approached her while they were at a gas station, and this woman made conversation about her "beautiful" scarf and South Asian outfit. "Nowadays you never know what people think about you because of the media, but it made me feel really good. Let me know there's good people out there." On another occasion, a man approached her and one of her sisters while they shopped, and essentially followed them and made them feel uncomfortable after commenting how beautiful they are to a creepy degree. It reinforced her belief that it does not matter how much skin you show or not, if someone wants to be inappropriate, they will be regardless of what you wear.

#### *Interviewee 4*

The fourth interviewee is a young woman who goes to college in North Carolina. She was born and raised in North Carolina to immigrant parents from a country in East Africa. She visits her relatives overseas almost every year. One year at the age of 16, before she started her junior year of high school, she wore a headscarf whilst overseas and continued to do so in public when she came back to the United States. She had not really intended to before she left that summer, but she had gotten so used to wearing it. She had never previously given the headscarf much thought personally, beyond understanding it as a religious obligation. However, growing up she noted that her cousins and some friends that she looked up to wore it, and that her parents or aunts/uncles would teasingly question why she did not, so a seed of expectation had been planted in her for herself. But she still had some uncertainty about wearing it. It is a social and cultural norm to wear a headscarf and dress modestly in her relatives' country, so she had gotten extremely accustomed to it.

She was so used to it that she wore it on the plane back to the U.S. and her mom asked her whether she was officially going to wear continue to wear it. She described "when I came back, I thought it'd be hard because you know, it'd be hard to adjust...But when I came, it was really easy for me. I just wore it. Maybe because I never really thought about what anyone thought anyways...". She described the earlier times of her wearing it, "...if I was to go shopping or to the library, I'd always feel as though people were looking at me even if they weren't. I just had this like feeling that there were like

10,000 eyeballs in my direction.” Though she went through a period of doubt about her decision to wear it, she ultimately chose to keep it on.

In spite of her decision, she found exceptions for when she would not wear it. She wanted to show her hair at weddings and special occasions, but she was eventually questioned by her mother. She feels that her parents were lenient with her for a while because they understood the adjustment and pressures by living in a non-Muslim majority country. Her mother explained that instead of being wishy-washy, a decision should be made as to whether she would like to wear the headscarf or not. She ultimately agreed with her mom and has since been consistent in her wearing of it, especially as she became more religious on her own. Her decision was made easier because of her desire to follow her belief of God’s command. As she describes it, “You have to suck it up, and just, no matter how hard it is, I feel like you have to reach some level of intent where you have to accept that this is what God expects of you.”

Once high school had started her junior year, she found that some friends did not recognize her because of the headscarf, which she found weird. She brushed it off, assuming it was simply obvious to her because it is her own face, but to others she may truly look unrecognizable with a scarf on. She received ignorant questions and comments, such as “Hey do you cover your hair because you no longer have it?” Some people asked her whether she converted to Islam; they did not even know she was Muslim until she began wearing a headscarf. She noticed the people who distanced themselves from her, too. She got the feeling that “people just always think I give off this feeling that I’m really serious. People would be scared to talk to me. Like...people would still talk to me,



but they'd distance themselves kind of..." She said she mostly only cared about the opinions of her peers, not people older or younger than her, not even teachers particularly. She worried over her peers perceiving her as dangerous, and she noticed how "in school people would even be scared to joke around me. As if I'm like, going to hurt them or I'm going to do something to them. Or that I'd tell on them or get them in trouble with a teacher."

She did not intentionally distance herself from anyone but reflected that it happened naturally due to having different sets of self-expectation and values upon wearing the headscarf. "...I'm not going to say that I like distanced myself from people who weren't like me spiritually, but like it just kind of happened..." As such she found herself more often with friends whose values aligned, many of them being Muslim. In the classroom she recalled how "people would bring up 9/11 and you'd be the first person they'd ask questions to, or even if they weren't, you'd feel that tension there..." Thus, there were instances that she was tangibly aware of her headscarf and what it meant to those around her. She knew of Muslim peers, male or female, who would try to assimilate as much as possible to avoid feeling different. "They even Americanize their own names. They don't want others to feel threatened by them I guess." However, she continued to embrace her life with the headscarf.

She feels that not much has changed in terms of tension in the classroom, as a college student. Unlike her high school, her college is "mostly white people." She describes her experience in school as "I go in, do my work, and get out. But...there's

tension there. Even in my world history class, and like my world religions class, they'd ask you questions as if you're the spokesperson for like all of Islam..."

In terms of general reactions that she gets out of people, she feels that before the "Trump election" people were more scared to say things that would offend. But even now she has not experienced traumatic events from wearing a headscarf. She admitted that she gets stares and the occasional rude comment, but that she knows friends or family who have experienced "worse." The strangest incident that she recalled was when her mother and she went to the DMV in 2017 to get new licenses, as she had lost her own, and her mother needed to update the address on her license. She knew that being at the DMV is always a time-consuming ordeal, but she and her mother had arrived there around 8:00 in the morning, and were there until 4:00 in the afternoon, which she found odd. At some point when she had finished up her business there with who appeared to be the White male manager, she joined her mother.

Her mother was being helped by a Black American woman, who began writing something to her mother and her on a piece of paper. On the note, the DMV woman explained that the reason it took so long for them is because of the extra paperwork needing to be done for women who wear a headscarf. The interviewee realized that the DMV man who helped her had asked a lot of questions, that essentially dug at her and her parents' backgrounds. She described him as saying, "'How long have your parents been here? Oh, your mom speaks very good English.' Like as if it was something surprising to him almost. But yeah, I actually called my dad and he was like, he wasn't surprised, but I was like, really hurt by it..." After ripping up the sheet she wrote on, the DMV woman

pulled out a huge file that contained information on Muslim men and women who had come to the DMV. Shocked and alarmed by this, she (the interviewee) wanted to say something to the manager. She felt that it was related to the idea of a Muslim registry that she heard about from media and social media. She wanted to say something but did not want to get the DMV woman (who went out of her way to share the information and file) in trouble or fired, so she kept quiet.

She recalled another incident during her earlier years of wearing a headscarf that took place at a gas station in D.C. She was there with just her father. They were both outside of the car as her dad put gas into the car, when a random man walked over to them and addressed her, “He was like ‘Tell your husband that you’re in America now, so you don’t have to wear a scarf.’ As if showing my hair, showing my skin, was a way of me not being oppressed. Or as if he was forcing something upon me.” Her dad intervened and corrected the man, stating he was her father, not husband. At which point the stranger questioned him for “making” her dress “that way.” Besides this event, she feels that other people have assumed she was her father’s wife instead of daughter, and it has become a perception that she wonders about at times too when she is with her father in public.

She has come to terms with experiences like these as a reality of living in the United States. She feels that the Trump administration “voices their hatred towards people like us, it gives other people the opportunity to be less scared to say it. And it just shows the hatred that people carry, that people come with.” She mostly learned to ignore it, but mentioned that it had taken her young, “naïve” self some time to accept the hurt that people may potentially inflict. However, she described in a journal entry that “I will

not allow them to strip me of one of the few aspects of my life in America that symbolize my dedication to my faith.” She shared how “at first I was always aware of this extra cloth on me, but like now it’s such a part of me that I forget sometimes that I’m even wearing it.”

When she did care, she would go out of her way to ease customers that came to the phone store she works at. She was aware of their desire to be helped by someone else and saw it as unease of being around her. Spanish-speaking customers were always surprised when she conversed in Spanish with them. Such encounters made her realize that she wished people were better informed about her religion, and not hesitant to ask and learn. “I can’t blame them for not knowing, but I can blame them for not choosing to like, inform themselves.” It bothered her at first, but for her own peace, she chooses to ignore it. In another journal entry she described getting ready for work and stopping to look in the mirror on her way out of the house. She did not regularly go out of her way to dress up or be “stylish” with her headscarf, but that morning she “felt beautiful in it. I framed my face with the hijab and really recognized how attached I was to the thought of doing this for [God], for my faith, for my own sense of identity.”

#### *Interviewee 5*

As a White/Native American convert to Islam for only 3 years, interviewee 5 is still new to the idea of wearing a headscarf. For her first year of being a Muslim, she did not wear a headscarf. She felt her anxiety creep at the thought of wearing it since she was still learning about Islam and considered the reactions of the people in her life. Around the second year since her conversion, she met another Muslim convert, who wore a

headscarf and would become her roommate. This young woman provided her with the practical, mental, and emotional support to begin wearing a headscarf in public. Newly equipped with scarves and pins, as well as a vision of strength and beauty in the practice, she wore her scarf with ease for a year. She did not mind any looks she may have received, as her roommate's spitfire personality rubbed off and helped her dash away the thoughts and cares of other people's perceptions.

Towards the end of her second year of wearing a headscarf (and third year since converting), interviewee 5 began to feel differently about the headscarf. Her roommate had long since moved to another city, so she no longer had support at home. A combination of personal reasons and a religious slump has made wearing the headscarf very difficult for her. She expressed gratitude for the arrival of the holy month of Ramadan, which she hoped would provide some spiritual revival and stave off her frequent thoughts of removing her headscarf from her public dress. The inner battle she faces is constant because she finds comfort in wearing a headscarf often enough, too. She described going to a breakfast joint at 2:00 in the morning without wearing a headscarf as "...I hated not wearing it, I was so uncomfortable. So, I knew, I probably am not going to take it off, because I was just so uncomfortable not wearing it."

She said that her prime reason for wanting to stop wearing it may be "because of social media. You know, just like, seeing pretty Instagram models and Tumblr or Twitter girls...sometimes I just feel so ugly." Additionally, she said "I feel isolated in public sometimes. I don't know, I just feel like an outsider walking around in public with hijab." These feelings of alienation solidified at the grocery store in which she used to work. She

described, “I just hated how like, abusive people were...people are so negative towards me...people will say really out of pocket and weird things while I’m working there I’m Muslim and wear hijab.”

In one instance a man saw some of her hair escaping her headscarf and said ““Oh since a little bit of your hair is showing, that means I’m your husband’ or something like that and I’m like ‘What?’ and [then he said] ‘Yeah, you can’t show your hair right?’” She wanted to call him out on his ignorant comment but did not want to compromise her job. A coworker who made a New Year’s resolution to wear the headscarf also encountered strange comments. However, this coworker was more sensitive and cried after someone said to her at the register, “You’re going to pay for my groceries, right?” and “That’s because it’s your religion, right? You’re supposed to buy me things.” Fortunately, aside from the “out-of-pocket” remarks and interactions with customers, there were kind and smiley customers, too. She shared how there was a particularly caring customer who always asked how she was and whether people were being nice to her, which always outshone the negative experiences at work.

Life outside of work presented negativity for her, as well. The visibility that donning a headscarf provides, “it creates like this constant state of anxiety that like, when I see someone, in my peripheral vision, walking really fast behind me, I like get really, really scared...I sometimes don’t feel comfortable being out alone.” Her anxiety when being alone in public was exacerbated after an incident that occurred on a train ride back from another city. Someone came and sat next to her and started saying “detrimental” things that played on her insecurities about the headscarf. She assumed the lady was

crazy since she tried to pull her headscarf off and said things like “You’re so pretty, why do you wear that? You need to take it off, so we can see how pretty you are.” She felt helpless to deal with her since no one tried to help her or confront the other woman. However, once the train ride was over, some people expressed their pity saying things like, “I’m so sorry you had to go through that...”, which served to make her cry and wonder why they did not intervene at the necessary time. Regarding the headscarf, this made her feel that “...even if people don’t feel comfortable with someone attacking someone for wearing it, they don’t feel comfortable enough to stop anything that’s going on towards a Muslim woman.”

In terms of other public experiences, she considers herself to be observant and able to read other people’s faces and vibes well. She ascertains whether people are staring at her out of curiosity or malice, and she reacts accordingly. If the look is accompanied with a smile, she will smile and look away. If it is curiosity she may give a smile again, or simply turn away and mind her business. When people are staring at her pointedly and negatively, she stares back and may give off exasperated body language signals back through her facial expression or stance. For example, when she went furniture shopping with her grandma (who is not Muslim/does not wear a headscarf), a saleswoman continued to stare at her, making no move to approach and help them. Thus, she stared back at the saleswoman and cocked her head in a “What are you looking at?” manner, at which point the saleswoman just turned away and walked to the back of the store. She admitted that she has some anger and road rage issues, but that “sometimes I just feel like I can’t be angry, because I don’t want people to think Muslims are like angry people or

mean people.” She sees it as both a blessing and curse since it helps her manage her anger, but she feels that at times she cannot express anger when it is truly justified because of the perceptions people may get about Muslims.

A setting she did not have to feel like a representative for the whole Muslim community was the classroom. When she was still in college, despite having mostly other White and/or non-Muslim students in her classes, she never felt singled out because of her headscarf. This was still the case in classes in which Muslims/Islam were a topic of discussion in some way. Another type of social setting that she frequents is nice shopping areas. She said that when “I’m the shopper, I feel like the store owners are like, afraid to treat me badly, because they don’t want to be perceived badly as someone who hates Muslims.” She generally keeps to herself though, as she does not expect people to approach her much because of her headscarf. She lightheartedly added that “when I’m in a little boutique I feel like they’re not used to Muslim women shopping for like, rompers and dresses,” and laughed.

In each of her diary entries, her struggle with choosing to wear a headscarf is reflected. Even the day she did not go out she described it as a day for her to not have any “qualms” about wearing her headscarf since she did not leave her apartment. She seemed mostly concerned about how presentable or pretty she looked. On one of the days she went shopping and “...it was definitely on my mind how I looked and while walking around the store, what others were thinking at some points.” In terms of the Presidential election, she feels that people tip-toe around talking politics with her, and that people are hyper aware of Muslims because of media coverage.



More than the presidential election, and besides the negative encounters she faces with non-Muslims in public, she was adamant and passionate about the judgement she witnesses from fellow Muslims on social media. She cited examples of Muslims attacking Muslim women on the amount of coverage they observed. Or they questioned the behavior of covered women, as if they have a separate standard of behavior automatically due to the headscarf. She finds such mentalities devastating and depressing since this is the community she expects and wants to receive nothing but support from. She explained that “I feel like on a scale of 1 to 10, non-Muslims will judge me, and it’s like a two. But when Muslims judge it’s at like a nine, or a ten even. I feel like actual Muslims are so mean to each other at times. I don’t know where it comes from.” She concluded by relaying that “I feel like I would be fine if the community here wasn’t so like, negative towards me sometimes.” Apparently, the heaviest comments she has received about the way she wears her headscarf come from people she knows personally.

### *My Headscarf Story*

I began wearing the headscarf at the age of 13 years, the summer before I started high school. I had gone through a soul-searching, religious journey around 8<sup>th</sup> grade. I considered wearing a headscarf once I realized I wanted to complete that aspect of my religion, but I was hesitant. It felt weird to be at school without a headscarf one day and show up the next day wearing one. Plus, middle school is not an ideal place to stick out like a sore thumb, which my headscarf would have achieved in my mostly White populated, little, Midwest town school. Until that point in my life, I never really felt drastically different from my peers, and never felt like an outsider for being of a different

color, religion, or ethnicity. It was all very matter-of-fact in my mind. I accepted that I was different, but never really focused on it.

All my life I had gone through the motions that Sunday school and my parents taught me, on how to be a Muslim. I usually prayed, fasted during Ramadan, went to the mosque for social events—the works. I already had a small interest in Islam, Islamic history, and the Qur'an, but Sunday school made it all feel like a chore. Once I started looking into other religions and researching in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, though, I made my own conclusions and personally embraced Islam. With a new sense of identity, I made my intention to wear it before high school began.

The month before high school started, I donned my headscarf for public use. I still recall the hyperawareness I had about whether people were staring at me. I did not have any specific perceptions in mind; I simply wanted to know if people would react at all. I found that most people did not stare, save some curious children. I did not feel the stares for the rest of that month. I felt liberated from the concept of looking pretty for others; I fully knew that I dressed for God and that I owed no one else anything. But on that first day of high school, it was like all eyes were on me. And truthfully, they probably were. The eyes mostly belonged to my peers of the same grade. A couple of my neighborhood friends already knew, from hanging out over the summer, but everyone else had curious looks on when they saw me. I vividly recall a crush I had in middle school, who I was fairly certain had a crush on me too, staring at me slightly wide-eyed as I walked past him in the hallway. I guess the crush had not evaporated over the summer. But I wondered

whether he would still have a crush on me, because of my headscarf. Despite it all, my feelings of faith, liberation, and self-esteem remained secure.

I was relatively shy in middle school, but I came out of my shell in those first couple of years in high school. I felt like a new me with my religion on my sleeve—or my head rather—and the confidence ebbed into my ability to make friends. I befriended some juniors from my Physical Education (P.E.) class; one of them is amongst my dearest friends to this day. One of the reasons that I approached her is because she had a “Muslim name” and also wore pants in P.E. rather than the usual shorts. That is, her name was typically associated with and relatively common amongst Muslims from various countries, and I figured the pants were due to the female modesty obligations in Islam. She is not Muslim and wore the pants out of personal comfort. Nonetheless our friendship was solidified due to our similar sense of humors. We always laughed at the shenanigans of a couple of boys, who were also juniors. She developed a crush on one, and I, on the other. But that crush did not last long for me.

We had formed a small, in-class friendship with these boys; they realized we laughed at their tomfoolery, and noticeably went out of their way to make us laugh ever since. I recall walking past the two boys after exiting the locker room one day. They were lined up, and my friend and I lined up nearby for attendance. We were having our own conversation, but my crush increased the volume of whatever he was saying. All I caught was that he kept saying the word “infidels” in a sarcastic way, while continuously glancing at me to gauge my reaction to whatever he said. I had no idea what “infidel” meant, but from the way he was behaving, I figured it was something I should, and it

probably was not good. I even tried getting it out of him, but he just stopped talking and looked away awkwardly. I assumed it had something to do with being Muslim, as no one else I asked knew what it meant. I looked it up later that night, and figured he had a distorted view of Islam and Muslims because of a particular verse in the Qur'an that is often taken out of context by Islamophobes.

The only other incidents I recall from high school regarding my headscarf were pretty minor to me at the time. During study hall my sophomore or junior year, a boy in the grade below mine asked me if I was a nun; he did not know anything about Islam or Muslims, let alone the Islamic notion of headscarves. I was a bit jarred, as most of my friends and people from the club I was a part of—the multicultural club—gave me a bubble of comfort and clearly cushioned the assumption that most everyone knows about Islam. I gave a brief explanation which he seemed happy with, and we continued doing our homework.

The last incident I remember is when I was at my locker in between class periods, and a girl walking by exclaimed in an exasperated voice, “Why wear that thing? This is America.” I whipped my head around to see who said it but was never sure of who it was in the busy hallway. I was surprised, unsure of whether that was directed towards me, but later convinced that it was, and annoyed. I could not understand what compelled her to say it. I was frustrated for being questioned about something important to me. Of course, now I have my suspicions, having come across the common stereotypes and perceptions people have of Muslim women, via the internet, but I will never truly know what she wanted to accomplish.

Towards the end of my high school career, my circle of friends was different from when I began high school. My older friends were graduated, and the couple of friends I had from the mosque that were my age did not wear headscarves. Looking pretty became more of a priority with my new friends, and my fascination with the headscarf after all the time I had worn it began to fade. It was simply another clothing item I was accustomed to wearing. I did not wear it as carefully as I used to; my bangs were fully visible, and I would not care to always fix my scarf if it slipped half way down my head. By the time my first college semester rolled around, I was used to the indirectly judging comments my mother and younger sisters—all of whom also wore headscarves—made about the “messy” way I wore my headscarf. My faith levels were not what they were when I began wearing the scarf, but Islam was still important to me. After my family and I moved to the South, though, my faith was tested.

The town we moved to felt even smaller than our Midwest one. I held stereotypes of the South harboring more racist people and bigots, and I thought that would manifest as attacks, physical or verbal, from people. On my first day at a community college, I was lost trying to find my classroom, and would have to enter the classroom with everyone already in there and the professor lecturing. I was so nervous I could not bring myself to enter the classroom. The next day I went to class and was early and watched the room fill up with fellow students. I felt like an alien and was worried someone would look at me strangely or even say something. No one did. For the rest of the semester though, I kept to myself and felt like everyone was unsure of how to act around me; I was unsure, too. I attributed every off behavior and hesitancy to my headscarf, although it may have just

been the vibes I had given off myself in my uncertainty. I managed to make one friend that I sat next to each day, who was extroverted and easy to talk to.

By the end of the semester, my family moved to another town just outside one of the biggest cities in our state. I transferred to the University of North Carolina at Greensboro that summer semester. I had been contemplating what life would be like without my headscarf for some time during the semester at the community college I attended. Would I have been more comfortable? Made more friends? I took the opportunity of being in a new city and school to remove my headscarf. I started looking into various interpretations of the Islamic understanding of the headscarf, and eventually concluded that although it is better to wear it, maybe it is not a requirement as I had previously felt. I did not tell any of my parents or sisters; I knew they would try to talk me out of it. I essentially lived a double life.

At school, none of my classmates and newly made friends knew I wore the headscarf outside of school. However, I was initially really aware that I did not have my scarf on. I was paranoid that someone would recognize me or know my family and question why I was not wearing my headscarf. When I went out with my parents and siblings though, I wore it like nothing had changed. I even got a job at a drug store that my family assumed I would be wearing my headscarf to. I felt mostly fine going out with my family whilst wearing my headscarf, but I always felt like I had to prove that I was an American like any other. I felt like my patriotism was always under suspicion because of my headscarf, mostly because of the stares or glares my family and I would occasionally receive. I purchased a canvas bag that had an American flag across it in place of my old

purse. I would wear necklaces or bracelets that were testimony to my citizenship. I put decals on my car. I always felt like I had something to prove.

As my double life began to catch up with me, I tried breaching the idea of not wearing a headscarf around my parents. They dismissed it and cited all the reasons that I had convinced myself with as an adolescent. I must have raised suspicion with my inquiry, though. One night my parents asked if they could visit me at work. I eventually confessed and as expected, they seemed disappointed. My mom tried convincing me to wear it again, but I argued against it. They knew that our religion left no room to force me to wear it, so they said they would pray for me and left me alone. The experience shook me nonetheless. I began questioning my decision again.

Over the course of a few days I sat back and analyzed how life had been since removing it. In all honesty, life was not great. I had friends, unlike in the community college, and I even felt like I got my job because I did not have the scarf on for the interview. However, I was not the confident, care-free girl I was in high school. I was often worried about how messy my hair was, or how pretty I was to people completely irrelevant to my life. I was now semi-accustomed to cat calls and unsolicited attention from strangers, on or off campus, and especially at work. It was not like I never received it when I wore a headscarf, but there was a noticeable spike after I removed it. At least when I wore it, I could attribute it to them gawking at my headscarf or faith-affiliation, but now I always felt unsure. My self-esteem was the lowest it had ever been, and I finally realized that so was my faith. After taking steps towards spiritual rejuvenation, I decided I wanted to wear a headscarf again. I did not wear it immediately, though. Fall

semester was coming to an end, so I would wear it coming back in the Spring. I thought my friends and classmates would think it weird if I randomly came to class wearing it when I had not been the week before.

The first day of Spring semester ran smoothly. Some of my friends and classmates, Muslim and non-Muslim, congratulated me on my decision and/or asked why. Over the course of the semester I noticed who distanced themselves and who stuck around. I had more Muslim friends by the end of the semester than non-Muslim friends, not of any intentional decisions on my part. It had been the opposite in the Fall semester.

My priorities had shifted, too. I was not as concerned about what people thought of me looks-wise, but I still was not where I was mentally, as in high school. I felt closer to my faith again, and I no longer felt as strong a desire to prove that I am American, but I sometimes felt that I could never truly seep into the crowd as I used to. At school I felt that I could, as campus was already pretty diverse and laid back. Sometimes an extended stare would make me uneasy and wonder if it was because they did not like Muslims. That awareness was always there when I was off campus. When shopping, especially by myself, I avoided looking anyone in the eye unless absolutely necessary. If I realized someone was staring at me, I usually averted my gaze and tried to leave the area. I would notice when parents pulled their kids closer or made sure they did not run off when I was nearby or passing by. The thought of someone thinking I am potentially dangerous hurt since I love children, so I began leaving a lot of space between myself and others if I could. If I was shopping with someone else, I could usually keep my brain preoccupied



with them and conversation, but I still maintained some awareness that people might be looking at me weirdly or feel unsafe around me.

For the remainder of my undergraduate career, I was still somewhat shy, a residue of the 6 months that I did not wear a headscarf full-time, but I was coming back out of my shell. Despite the anxiety that sometimes accompanied wearing my headscarf, I was happy with my choice.

Nowadays, my headscarf is just another part of me. I am still shy at times, but it is usually because of a general, social anxiety, not because of my headscarf and what people might think of me in relation to it. I sometimes forget that I am wearing my headscarf until someone looks at me rudely. There are still days where I wonder whether someone's rude actions towards me are because of my scarf, whether they are a rude person by personality, or whether they are just having a bad day. Once when I was in a public restroom, I saw that a woman made eye contact with me through the mirror since my sink was right by the door. I also noticed that she smiled at the lady a few sinks over. Was she just not ready to smile from entering the bathroom and me being right there? Or did she only smile at the other woman because she was comfortable doing so? Nonetheless, such instances do not affect the way I behave around others like it used to. The old me would have avoided looking at anyone through the mirror.

I try to calm my upset or keep a steady face in certain situations, because I do not want people to think badly of Muslims. I do think that many people will attribute my behavior to that of all Muslims or Islam, especially by the way people reacted to news stories on the internet involving Muslim criminals. There was an instance that I did not

do so, though. When I was in New York City with my siblings, we passed by an older White man, possibly homeless. He was smoking a cigarette but stopped mid-drag just to mutter while staring at us, “Fuck you, Moslems. Get out of here, you.” My sisters bolted to the other side of the street, but I glared back at him, angry that he scared my siblings. As I ran to catch up with my sisters, I saw the fear on their faces. I yelled back some profanities about his “Trump loving” self to leave us alone. I have no idea if he heard us.

The only time that I was consistently aware of my headscarf again was at work. I had started a new job doing front desk at a physician’s office around the time leading up to, during, and after the 2016 presidential election. It took me a few months to get totally comfortable with my work tasks, especially checking patients in. People seemed to be uncomfortable around me, or at least do a double take. It may have been because I was not doing a great job, though. However, I was very aware of when patients were snippy when dealing with me, but all smiles with my coworkers. I have long since stopped feeling hurt by such behavior. I also noticed when people felt unsure of whether they could say “Merry Christmas” to me. I began smiling and beating them to the punch in saying it, so that there was no guesswork for them. For certain patients that I could tell were more comfortable with my coworkers, I would “leave to use the restroom” and ask them to help that patient instead.

After Trump became president, I was more careful about being out alone. I felt like some people went out of their way to smile or say hi to me. I also felt that some had become more obvious and bold with their glares or head-shaking, too. Professors and classmates asked how I was and whether I felt safe. That made me feel like I truly had

something to be afraid of, but I was touched and grateful for their concerns. I felt that the people who have negative views of Islam might feel braver about expressing it now, but I did not focus or dwell on it. The NYC incident happened before Trump was officially President, but I clearly held perceptions about certain groups of people, and how they perceived me. I sometimes assume White Non-Muslim people who are strangers are more likely to be scared of me, more likely to assume I am not from the United States, more likely to hold negative views of Islam/Muslims, and more likely to express Islamophobia to me, than other groups. I also assume that Black Non-Muslim people are more comfortable around Muslims, or at least more educated about it, though I have had experiences that could prove this personal stereotype otherwise. These assumptions have affected my behavior at times. I am more cautious and guarded in a White-majority setting, I have realized, if they are all strangers. If I gather at the time that I am being so, I try to smile more right away, and make conversation even when I do not feel like it, at hopes that others will see and feel more at ease, too.

Overall, I feel like my perceptions and behaviors vary from day-to-day, setting-to-setting. Although I have come a long way in my thoughts about the headscarf, I appreciate its existence in my life, with all the good and the bad.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

Each woman I interviewed comes from a different background and set of experiences. Racially, ethnically, and class-wise, these women are a show of diversity. Most of them were college educated, or in college, save for the older woman from North Africa. The styles in which they wear their headscarves, and the kind of way, or degree to which they cover the rest of themselves varies, too. Some wore tight clothing, and some did not. Some showed some or a lot of their hair, while others showed virtually none. At the end of the day though, each woman chose to wear a headscarf in America.

#### *Reasons for Wearing the Headscarf*

Despite any differences amongst the women, the reasons for wearing a headscarf reappear from what I found in the literature review. Every woman I interviewed wears it out of faith and connection with God, and a sense of Muslim identity. Many of them wore it because other women in their lives wore it, such as family members and close friends. Interviewees 1 and 5 have no family members who wear it, although their families seemed supportive or at the least, indifferent. I have seen cases where women, whose family members disagree with the headscarf, felt forced to hide it from their families. I saw no signs of that being the case for any of these women. Interviewee 4 seems to have dealt with external influence from family and social norms of her relative's country

although the decision was ultimately her own. She did not express feeling forced or compelled to wear the headscarf, but she seemed to value input from her family, and meshed it with her religious understanding and self-expectation to wear it, as I had done the second time around of wearing a headscarf. The rest of the interviewees began to wear it purely from internal volition and faith, as I had when I first started wearing it in high school.

### *Perceptions & Behaviors*

It is important to mention here that despite input from family members for one of the interviewees, and inspiration from friends or family for the rest, none of the women mentioned wearing it in relation to a male figure in their lives. Of the main stigmas that women who wear headscarves have to contend are that we are oppressed and submissive, especially by Muslim men. Interviewee 4 mentioned that she wondered whether people thought that she was her father's wife when she was out in public with him, and I have thought the same. When my family is out and about together, I sometimes wonder whether people think my father has multiple wives (my sisters and I, plus my mother). The man at the gas station who confronted her, and her father made it clear that he thought that she was forced by her "husband," or father, to wear it, and he denied it after being "told off" by her dad. At what point can we stop thinking that others hold us in an Orientalist or Third World Woman light?

Regardless of when the struggles began or ended in our headscarf "careers," many of us shared certain worries and perceptions about, or in relation to, those around us and dealt with them accordingly. Each of us could sense people staring at us, and/or

distancing themselves from us, and we interpreted it to being as a result of our headscarves. In some way or another, we find ourselves to be spectacles for others. All of us found ourselves aware that people may think of us as foreign, or not from America. I preemptively tried to combat that at some point, by wearing patriotic accessories. Another way to deal was by refusing to tell people our heritage/our parents' backgrounds when asked where we were from. In each case, a stigma was managed through "liberated performance" and identity solidified publicly and internally (Gurbuz and Gurbuz-Kucuksari 2009).

Many of us *continue* to wear it from that sense of identity and faith, as well as an acquired comfort, ease, and habitude. However, all of us faced disruptions despite our habit, depending on the day and setting. Although every woman described times where they "forget" about having their headscarves on in public, as mentioned in the interviews as well as journals, I would argue that every day of wearing a headscarf brings the threat of "something" happening (Habeas Viscus), and this threat is active and something every woman accepts when they place the scarf on their head.

All of us experienced hyper-awareness of whether people were staring at us (whether that was actually the case or not) when we began to wear the scarf. We had no idea how people would act now that we wore this additional piece of clothing. All of the interviewees, except interviewee 5 and myself, described the initial stages of wearing our headscarves as anything but easy, though. The others dealt with more anxiety and struggled to deal with the experiences they faced as a result of wearing headscarves, mostly resulting from experiences with peers. But interviewee 5 and I cruised through

that first stage of wearing it, not minding what others thought; we quieted our anxieties of what others thought before making the decision to wear it. We remained aware of stares, but we dismissed them. The others though, felt comfortable after they reinserted themselves amongst their peers and friends. Even when we go out of our houses with headscarves not expecting anything to happen, we are bound to face the ever-present stares as constant reminders that yes, we have this extra piece of clothing on. How we react and emotionally deal with that may vary, but the experience is across the board, even on a diverse college campus.

#### *Conditions Contributing to Difficulties*

After interviewee 5 lost the mental/emotional/spiritual support of her roommate though, her insecurities began creeping in. For myself, I experienced the stresses and anxieties of wearing a headscarf in relation to my peers after two of my closest friends graduated from high school; I was still a sophomore. It hit even harder after moving to the South and having no friends. For both of us, without the comfort and support that our friends provided, it appears we were suddenly aware of the social expectations to fit in and be beautiful. Interviewee 5 felt that internally, by seeing conventionally beautiful women who do not wear headscarves on social media. However, I still internally was adamant about wearing the headscarf, up until moving to a new place. It seems that having friends, especially those who wear headscarves, may make the experience easier, even if it was not hard to begin with. Perhaps it is a safety-in-numbers phenomenon, or a quieting of anxieties that having company provides.

### *Revisiting Du Bois*

As mentioned in the literature review, double-consciousness is living and being, “with a veil and gifted with second sight in this American world...this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (Du Bois 1903). The results of this study would suggest at least two expansions to the assertions of Du Bois. Firstly, double-consciousness can be extended beyond the demarcations of Black and White people. Intriguingly, and even a bit ironically, Du Bois describes the veil, which is also useful in describing the experiences of women who wear the headscarf.

Something unaccounted for is the overlap of other social factors that affect our lives. The race/skin tone, age, and ethnicity of each woman may affect differently the way we expect others to treat us. I noticed that although Du Bois’ concept of “the veil” is a demarcation between Black and White people, it is significant to note that Black Muslim women who wear the headscarf feel at loss from all of the axes that their lives rest on: race, age, gender, and/or sexuality. I have encountered at least two Black Muslim women who were aware of their multiply disadvantageous social positions. I recall one declaring, “Sometimes I wonder how I get by, being Black, Muslim, *and* a woman, wearing the hijab no less!”

Additionally, I have noticed that some Black people, presumably Non-Muslim, glare or make comments at me in relation to my headscarf. I wonder whether it is because of race; would their reaction be different to a Black Muslim woman who wears a headscarf? Being of a disadvantaged group oneself does not magically make one aware



of other people's social problems. The media coverage of Muslims is also shared to everyone in the same way, so unless one has had the environment, education and experiences necessary to combat those images, they are not free from influence of those ideas.

Interviewees 1 and 5, both White women, specifically mentioned feelings of isolation. Interviewee 1 explained that "sometimes I feel like it causes a social barrier among people" in describing people's hesitancy to approach her and/or ask questions. All of us tended to feel awareness and anxiety in areas with more White people. (The exceptions were school, where people became relatively used to the sight of us in class or hallways, either by growing up with us, or seeing women who wear headscarves frequently enough.) Du Bois' veil originally distinguished Black people from White people in a White world. As interviewee 5 is quite newly Muslim, and even newer to wearing a headscarf, perhaps she feels isolated as a result of being on the White side of the veil previously. Interviewee 1 is White too, went through her rough patch with the headscarf earlier on in her headscarf career, and acknowledged it as a "social barrier" at times. Maybe the non-White interviewees and I were used to being on the "other" side of the veil, leaving more space to focus on stigma management and identity construction, rather than missing the greener side of the veil we were never on. Interviewee 1 has her half North African heritage to help settle her on the other side of the veil, but interviewee 5 may be struggling in her decision due to her having been on the White side of the veil without little other social demarcation.

Finally, there are ways in which this double-consciousness can be mitigated, and perhaps even resolved. When we sensed discomfort or unease from others, the interviewees and I tended to distance ourselves to some degree, either by physically moving away, and/or closing off communication. That seems to be the case for interviewees 3 and 4 especially. Interviewee 3 said "...if I'm by myself then I definitely don't engage more, I'm like, scared of what could happen." She also kept to herself and/or smiled less when sensing distrust or discomfort from patients at the office she worked in. She maintained that this was "for her own dignity" and that she reserved friendlier and lively conversations with those who provided her with the same attitude. Interviewee 4 initially engaged in extra conversation with uncomfortable customers at the phone shop as an attempt to change their ideas, and in order "to ease them, and get them into thinking that, or knowing that I wasn't going to...try to do something to them." Eventually she grew more comfortable with the idea of simply giving them what they wish—someone they would be more comfortable talking with: "I'm not going to interfere with anything, so I'll just go call someone else."

Unlike interviewees 3 and 4, when interviewee 1 experienced anything that made her aware of her headscarf, she chose to make excuses for people's attitudes or actions, because "people do have bad days..." Nowadays she remains oblivious to people. Even while her friends may catch someone staring or giving her a "dirty look" she is wholly unaware of it, implying she goes out of her way to remain unfocused on the gazes of others while out. I find myself doing the same, and I certainly did so in my earlier years of wearing a headscarf that I describe as "smooth sailing." There is nothing for me to be

afraid of if I do not give people the opportunity to phase me by remaining unaware of my surroundings, namely people.

The interviews further revealed that women who wear headscarves care about the thoughts of those around us, the degree varying. The need to calm anger in front of Non-Muslims or having to hold back a would-be reaction or statement, so as not to portray a bad image of Muslims/Islam, means that their conduct is changing in relation to perceptions of Non-Muslim others. Examples from the interviews may indicate that the specific stereotypes about Muslims may not be present to the Muslim women's minds during an incident. Instead, their minds just carry the vague assumption that Non-Muslims likely carry negative ideas about Islam while the interaction occurs. Interviewee 5 described staring back at a furniture sales representative, connoting exasperation and feelings reflecting her statement, "Okay, why are you staring at me?" The representative had not done or said anything particularly indicative of being malicious, but interviewee 5 followed the story by describing this reaction as one to "...mean people." The women may wonder what people think about them on their own time, but at the time of an occurrence, they may only be aware of it as a positive or negative one. Speaking for myself, that is generally the case. While interviewee 5's coworker was questioned by a customer about paying for said customer's groceries, she reacted by crying. She did not try to address the possibly implied submissive-woman stigma. In similar instances, interviewee 5 said that she transfused situations where people "...would say out-of-pocket things," by brushing them off, or else "...I would've probably lost my job."

For any qualms women who wear headscarves may have about opinions of strangers that are Non-Muslim, it seems, through the interviews, that the opinions and judgements of fellow Muslims are more distressing and weighty. Attesting to the strength of in-group dynamics, the experience of wearing a headscarf seems easier on a Muslim woman when amongst other women who wear it, but equally troubling when the judgements are negative from fellow Muslims. The vexation that interviewee 5 feels when seeing judgement from other Muslims is tougher on her since she expects support from the group she had just recently joined. But frustration is still present for women who have been Muslim all of their lives. Interviewee 3 was perplexed by the discomfort a long-time friend had in introducing his girlfriend to her, on the basis that she is somehow more religious due to her headscarf. (Not that being religious equals being judgmental.) In the same way that Muslim women who wear a headscarf construct their identities in relation to the stigmas of Non-Muslims, they may have to do so with fellow Muslims as well. I do find myself having to mitigate what I say to some self-proclaimed “liberal Muslims” so as not to appear as strict or inflexible. Not only are women who wear headscarves contending with conventional ideas of beauty and fashion, and the stigmas of mainstream narratives of Muslims, they also have to maneuver the expectations of certain other Muslims in relation to their public identity constructions.

#### *What of the 2016 Presidential Election?*

Clothing communicates to other people about the wearer. Headscarves to this day seem to communicate the ideas of submission and terror that held true to people 15+ years ago; perhaps nothing has changed. The events of 9/11 tie into some of the women’s

anxieties of what people are thinking of them. It seemed to come up more often than the 2016 presidential election. Or rather, the 2016 election was simply an extension or resurfacing of the tensions that 9/11 summoned. As I did not wear a headscarf in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, when 9/11 occurred, I cannot recall any specific incidents or bullying from others. Some of the women described feeling more cautious and unsafe after being aware of attacks on Muslims or by Muslims through the news or social media (Habeas Viscus). Some avoided going out alone, and others out at all, in fear of our safety. Although everyone feels that the election of President Trump brought forth hate and potential danger to us, we also experienced kindness and openness from people, even from strangers. It solidified all of our desires for people to be educated about our religion and choice, by asking questions unapologetically and standing up when we are mistreated purely for being Muslim. The Western ideas of security safety and freedom (Davids 2014) are arguably being changed in the minds of those with the courage and honesty to ask questions and learn. In this way, women who don the headscarf would perhaps lose the idea that we represent all Muslims because of our visibility.

Whether the effects of wearing a headscarf are small or big, they are present. Every woman has faced positive and negative experiences in relation to it in their public lives. And all of us have engaged in behavior we might not have, had we not worn it. The 2016 Presidential election has not exacerbated these perceptions and behaviors, but they have had some impacts and made it clear that 15+ years after 9/11, being visibly Muslim is not a neutral state of being in public

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